DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 065 JC 920 523

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TITLE Freud, Problem Solving, Ethnicity, and Race: Integrating Psychology into the Interdisciplinary Core Curriculum.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 17p.; In: Teaching of Psychology: Ideas and Innovations. Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology (6th, Ellenville, NY, March 18-20, 1992); see JC 920 516.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Psychology; *Core Curriculum; Course Content; *Curriculum Design; Curriculum Development; Ethnicity; *General Education; Higher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Liberal Arts; *North American Culture; Problem Solving; *Psychology; Racial Factors; Undergraduate Study; Values; Western Civilization
IDENTIFIERS Freud (Sigmund); *Moravian College PA

ABSTRACT

The new core curriculum at Moravian College, in Pennsylvania, utilizes an interdisciplinary approach, integrating topics of psychology into three of the seven core courses: "Microcosm/Macrocosm"; "Quantitative Problem Solving"; and the seminar "Gender, Ethnicity, and Race." The course "Microcosm/Macrocosm" focuses on major themes in Western Culture. Psychology is introduced into the course through examinations of Sigmund Freud's views on the human mind and culture, completion of dream analysis assignments, and written responses to readings of Freud's correspondence with Albert Einstein. The course "Quantitative Problem Solving" focuses on understanding problem representations, heuristics, decision strategies, logic, and critical thinking processes. The course utilizes elements of cognitive psychology dealing with problem solving and decision making, such as memory structure and the constraints imposed by it. Students in the course complete two projects with psychological elements: designing a behavior modification or life-style management project; and conducting an analysis of the social roles viewed during three hours of prime time television. The core seminar focuses on "American character." Students explore the ideas of self-reliance, conformity, individualism, honesty, and prejudice through novels, a play, films, and autobiographies which address issues of gender, ethnicity, and race. Though the course does not explicitly incorporate psychological topics, it is taught jointly by a social psychologist, a theologian, and an education professor who provide an interdisciplinary orientation. (PAA)

ED350065

Freud, Problem Solving, Ethnicity, and Race: Integrating Psychology into the Interdisciplinary Core Curriculum

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Presentation Given at the

The 6th Annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology: Ideas and Innovations

March 18 - 20, 1992

JC 920 523

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Abstract

Psychology can be an integral and flexible component within interdisciplinary core curricula. I discuss how psychology is integrated into three of seven core courses in Moravian College's new curriculum. The psychological topics presented in Microcosm/Macrocosm, Quantitative Problem Solving, and the Core Seminar are not meant to be exhaustive introductions to the field of psychology; rather, the topics are meant to serve as representative examples of how intellectual issues can be approached from a psychological perspective within an interdisciplinary context.

Freud, Problem Solving, Ethnicity, and Race:
Integrating Psychology into the Interdisciplinary
Core Curriculum

Within the continually shifting trends of higher education, none is subject to more debate than the place of the core curriculum. In academic settings, the decision to institute such a program at all is only half the battle -- the discussion of what courses to place within it and what disciplines to prominently represent (or not) can create as much furor. It can be argued that specific content of core courses is not the real issue; instead, emphasis on intellectual rigor and flexibility across courses may be the key to a viable curriculum. In short, the traditional disciplinary focus can be sacrificed in favor of an interdisciplinary one.

Psychology's Place in the Core Curriculum

The discipline of psychology can be an integral and flexible component within core curricula. Within some core programs, psychology can be one of the main offerings, a single course that gives an overview of the entire field or one area in it. Topics from cognitive psychology, such as memory and decision making, could be the center of a course on problem solving. Similarly, a course emphasizing the experience of the individual within groups or the wider social world could utilize material from social psychology.

In other curricula, select topics from psychology may be embedded within the material of a course or courses as a means to promote a more interdisciplinary focus. Thus, psychology may be

placed within some broader context -- Western culture or the scientific method, for example.

Moravian College's new core curriculum, which has been partially funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), utilizes this interdisciplinary option by placing psychological topics within three of the curriculum's seven core courses: Microcosm/Macrocosm II (M/M II), Quantitative Problem Solving (QPS), and the Core Seminar (CS) (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 About Here

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how psychological topics, when embedded within particular courses, can contribute to the development of interdisciplinary core curricula. To do so, I will provide an overview of our three courses and then explicitly discuss the role of psychological topics within each one.[1]

Microcosm/Macrocosm

The freshmen year of Moravian's core contains a two-semester sequence of courses, M/M I and II, which focuses on major themes in Western culture. The title "Microcosm/Macrocosm" is meant to convey the method of the course -- the examination of a representative work (e.g., Sophocles' Antigone as "microcosm") in order to understand the cultural milieu in which it was created (i.e., the political and social worlds of ancient Greece, the

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[1]Syllabi from the three core courses may be obtained from the author.

"macrocosm"). Given this unusual melding of text and time, the course is designed to be very different from the usual introductory history of Western culture class. During the 1991 - 1992 academic year, the M/M courses were staffed by faculty from foreign languages, religion, history, and psychology.

Psychology is introduced in M/M II by examining Sigmund Freud's views on the human mind and culture. Freud is an appropriate figure for study not only because of his high name recognition among undergraduates, but also because his ideas represent a move toward applying the scientific method to understanding human experience. The goal of this unit is to have students wrestle with the difficulties Freud faced in creating an account of human nature that is based on myth, Enlightenment philosophy, fledgling science, intuition, and his experience with patients. The students are left to decide for themselves if Freud's ideas are legitimate and useful for describing human experience.

Students read an introductory essay[2] (Dunn, 1991) and two texts: On Dreams (Freud 1901/1989), an encapsulated version of Freud's method of dream analysis, and Civilization and Its Discontents (Freud 1930/1961), an often dark account of his views on cultural advancement and self-alienation. Freud's 1932 correspondence with Albert Einstein, the Why War? letters (Einstein and Freud, 1932/1964), and a more recent account of the nature of dreams (Dolnick, 1990) are also used for discussion.

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[2]Faculty teaching in M/M I & II have typically written overview essays of the topics they present, a provision which allows them to introduce their particular point of view.

Students complete two writing projects during the Freud segment of M/M II. In the first, they interpret a dream in the Freudian manner, which means they keep a dream diary, free associate to all parts of a selected dream, and then consider in what ways the latent content of the dream suggests a wish fulfillment. The second project involves responding to the Why War? letters. After reading the short correspondence, students compose a letter in response to the ideas presented in it. This response is addressed to Freud, to Einstein, or both (see Dunn, in press).

The Freud segment was also designed to be flexible, so material could be added or deleted as necessary. This semester, for example, a psychoanalytic interpretation of the play Hamlet (one of Freud's passions) was replaced by two sessions devoted to the ideas of Carl Jung. A colleague from Moravian's Religion and Philosophy Department who has a strong interest in Jungian symbolism lectured on Freud's former disciple and rival. This change allowed students to learn about a competing approach to the problems studied by Freud, and it did so by emphasizing an interdisciplinary side of these "psychological" topics.

Quantitative Problem Solving

Interdisciplinary contributions to understanding problem representations, heuristics, decision strategies, logic, and critical thinking processes are reviewed in QPS, another freshman-level course. The goal of the course is to teach the student to approach solving problems in a systematic fashion, one that focuses on process rather than obtaining the "correct"

answer. The team developing this course (an education professor, a mathematician, and a sociologist) wrote a text (see Dilendik, Somers, & Smolansky, 1992) promoting the CORE model for problem solving.

CORE is an acronym for a recommended four-step approach to problem solving. These steps include **clarifying** the problem, **organizing** available information, **resolving** the problem by relating pieces of the information and testing possible solutions, and **examining** the outcome. Students learn to move through these steps sequentially, although they are encouraged to "loop back" to earlier steps in the model as needed.

Beyond gaining familiarity with the CORE model, students learn how to graph and to chart data, as well as to create and to interpret data tables and diagrams. Probability, statistics, and logic are covered in some detail in the course, given their use in problem solving. Particular emphasis is placed on training students to draw appropriate rather than biased inferences from quantitative information. To achieve these goals, students also read a text on biases in reasoning (Campbell, 1974), as well as a book on critical thinking (Browne & Keeley, 1990) and one dealing with probability (Truxal, 1989).

Psychology's major contribution to QPS is to draw attention to perspectives on problem solving and decision making often studied in cognitive psychology. When learning about developing knowledge structures for problem solving, for example, students learn about memory structure and the apparent constraints posed by it. The examination of verbal, symbolic, and visual problem

representations illustrates the ease with which various categories of problems may (or may not) be solved. Across the course, students are exposed to both search strategies (e.g., random trials, algorithms, hill-climbing methods) and decision strategies (e.g., additive weighting, decision trees, hypothesis testing).

Students complete two projects across the semester, both of which have psychological overtones. In the first, students essentially design a behavior modification or life-style management project. They first read a detailed analysis of smoking as a life-style management problem and then, following this model, select an actual problem they wish to resolve (e.g., test anxiety, procrastination, weight). To appropriately tackle their problem and to complete the assignment, they must proceed step by step through the CORE model.

The second project, a content analysis exercise, is more oriented toward data analysis. Students are divided into groups, each of which monitors one evening's worth of the prime time (8:00 to 11:00 p.m.) television programs on one of the major networks. Each group concentrates on one category of social roles pertaining to the programs' characters -- gender roles, racial/ethnic portrayals, or age differences. To achieve this goal, each group develops data collection schedules and coding frames so that a variety of variables (e.g., type of show, age/gender/minority status of main characters, personal traits of those characters, theme of episode or film) can be recorded. All data are then entered into a collective file and subjected to

statistical analysis so that the results can be written up and presented to the whole class.

In a very real sense, the goal of the QPS course is to illustrate that any data -- psychological or otherwise -- cannot be understood in isolation. Creative problem solving can occur when an interdisciplinary perspective is adopted.

The Core Seminar: Gender, Ethnicity, and Race

"American Character" is the focus of the sophomore CS, the capstone course in Moravian's core curriculum. We use the term "character" to refer to all those qualities that make an individual different from others. In particular, character can include one's personal moral nature or strength. The goal of this last course is to critically explore the arguably unique (and often contradictory) aspects of American character, including self-reliance, conformity, individualism, honesty, and prejudice. The CS is currently staffed by a social psychologist, a theologian, and an education professor.

In lieu of traditional textbooks, the course relies on novels, a play, and three autobiographical works -- each of which was written by an American author dealing with an American theme or issue. However, the recent sociological tour de force on American values, Habits of the Heart (Bellah et al., 1985), does serve to organize many of the themes presented in these readings. Issues raised by the literary works or the Habits text are further explored by having students watch a variety of American films. These films range from that classic portrayal of love and American heroism, "Casablanca," to the uncertainty of

understanding between races illustrated by Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing."

Psychology is least explicit in this final course in the core curriculum, but traditionally psychological topics abound in the issues covered in readings and class discussion. Gender and race are obvious in their psychological content, ethnicity less so. However, individual and group processes are common to all three topics, and undoubtedly influence the development of American character as well.

Thus, while prejudice and discrimination are discussed in the course of reading The Autobiography of Malcolm X (X & Haley, 1964), no conscious effort is made at the outset to couch these issues in current psychological theory. Rather, it was assumed that because I was the only psychologist teaching in the CS, I would offer comments when the issues arose in the course of discussion. In developing the course, the faculty involved went out of their way to avoid imposing any initial disciplinary boundaries so that spontaneous analysis and debate could be fostered in the classroom. Further, it was our hope that the CS could serve as the appropriate context where material learned in the earlier core courses could be applied.

Gender is explored through discussing novels and contemporary research in social science. Hawthorne's (1986) The Scarlet Letter, Updike's (1968) Couples, and selections from Deborah Tannen's (1990) You Just Don't Understand provide fertile ground for discussing the often difficult relations between men and women. The current problems women experience in balancing

career with family is examined in chapters from The Second Shift (Hochschild, 1990), a penetrating analysis of role demand and conflict among American women.

The CS's semester-long project deals with ethnicity as a component in character. Early in the term, students are asked to consider how their ethnic backgrounds helped, if at all, to shape their own sense of self. The remainder of the semester is spent researching the selected ethnic group from four perspectives that comprise a final paper. First, students perform traditional library research to uncover their chosen group's history and culture in America. Second, insofar as it is possible, students read a novel by an American who identifies with their group. In the third part of the project, students are asked to comment on how they believe their ethnic group fits into the American scene. The final section, a personal statement, allows the student to reflect on ethnicity as a component in American character.

The topic of the CS is meant to be open to change from year to year. The first year, the faculty involved wanted to capitalize on the national debate concerning diversity, an important aspect of the American experience. This focus will undoubtedly give way to another, but the effort to tie together themes from the earlier six courses through the CS will remain a constant.

Conclusions

The psychological topics presented in our three core courses are not meant to be exhaustive introductions or surveys of the field of psychology. Rather, they are meant to serve as

representative examples of how intellectual issues can be approached from a psychological perspective and within an interdisciplinary context. Students undoubtedly learn some factual material about psychology; however, the core curriculum's real intent is to teach them to evaluate problems or debates from the divergent points of view provided by several academic disciplines, including psychology.

Further, these psychological topics are not taught exclusively by psychologists. While plenary sessions on a distinct topic from psychology (e.g., dream analysis in the segment devoted to Freud) may be taught by myself, the smaller discussion groups are led by professors representing classics, education, foreign languages, history, mathematics, and religion. These faculty are free to add their own disciplinary perspectives to the topic so that the interpretation of the psychological material is truly interdisciplinary.

Moravian College's core curriculum has been in operation for a short two years, and growing pains are a reality within any new curriculum. Some topics work, others must be discarded. In order to maintain an interdisciplinary focus and to keep the course material fresh, faculty, too, will cycle in and out of core courses across time. We anticipate that psychology will remain a major part of the core, though perhaps not in the specific fashion I have discussed in this paper. This fact is all to the good if the core curriculum is to continue to develop along with the disciplines taught within it.

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Author Notes

I am grateful to Sarah Dunn, Kay Somers, and Stacey Zaremba for comments on a previous draft of this paper. Presentation of this paper was facilitated by funding from the Moravian College Faculty Development and Research Committee. Correspondence concerning this paper should be sent to the author, Department of Psychology, Moravian College, 1200 Main Street, Bethlehem, PA 18018.

Table 1

Sequence of Seven Core Courses Across Freshmen and Sophomore Years

	Fall Semester	Spring Semester
Freshmen Year	Microcosm/Macrocosm I	Microcosm/Macrocosm II
	Communication	Quantitative Prob. Solving
Sophomore Year	Global Issues	Core Seminar
	Revolutions In Science	